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ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	ACQ-01	DODE-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00
	DS-00	UTED-00	H-01	IM-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	L-01
	ADS-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00
	PRS-00	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	TRSE-00	T-00	PMB-00
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O 252307Z NOV 98
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2397
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
CIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 1975
USCINCSO MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 003540

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, VE

SUBJECT: STRIVING TO BEAT CHAVEZ

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SUMMARY

1. TWELVE DAYS BEFORE VENEZUELA'S DECEMBER 6 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, HIGHLY RESPECTED POLLING AGENCY DATOS RELEASED ITS LATEST POLL SHOWING HUGO CHAVEZ LEADING HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER BY 6 POINTS. MEANWHILE, THIRD PLACE CANDIDATE LUIS ALFARO UCERO AND FOURTH PLACE CANDIDATE IRENE SAEZ STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL. LAST WEEK, SAEZ THWARTED EFFORTS BY CHRISTIAN SOCIAL PARTY (COPEI) TO CAST HER ASIDE TO PAVE THE WAY FOR A DEMOCRATIC ACTION (AD)/COPEI ALLIANCE. ON NOVEMBER 24, AD PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ALFARO HURRIEDLY RETURNED TO CARACAS FROM A CAMPAIGN SWING THROUGH AMAZONAS STATE TO QUASH NASCENT EFFORTS BY NEWLY ELECTED AD GOVERNORS TO DEPOSE HIM AS AD'S CANDIDATE. END SUMMARY.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ALAN H FLANIGAN
DATE/CASE ID: 08 JUN 2007 200504156

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SIX POINTS APART TWELVE DAYS AWAY

2. THE LATEST POLLING RESULTS OF HIGHLY RESPECTED OPINION SURVEY AGENCY "DATOS," PUBLISHED IN CARACAS' "EL UNIVERSAL" ON NOVEMBER 25, SHOWED HUGO CHAVEZ AS THE LEADING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WITH 45.8 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER COMES IN SECOND WITH 40.7 PERCENT, AND LUIS ALFARO UCERO IS A DISTANT THIRD WITH ONLY 6 PERCENT, WITH 11IN AN UNDECIDED OR DON'T KNOW CATEGORY. ACCORDING TO DATOS, ALFARO IS REJECTED BY 40 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE. CHAVEZ HAS THE SECOND HIGHEST NEGATIVE RATING (REJECTED BY 33.5 PERCENT OF VOTERS), AND SALAS HAS THE LOWEST NEGATIVE RATING OF LEADING CANDIDATES AT 8.7 PERCENT. DATOS' POLL IS ONE OF THE LAST THAT WILL BE PRINTED IN THE NEWSPAPERS BEFORE THE ELECTION SINCE, BY LAW, POLLS CANNOT BE PUBLISHED WITHIN SEVEN

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DAYS OF ELECTION DAY.

SALAS CONTINUES TO CAMPAIGN HARD

3. SALAS ROMER, THE SECOND PLACE CANDIDATE, REVEALED HIS CAMPAIGN PLATFORM ON NOVEMBER 18 TO AN ENTHUSIASTIC CROWD. PRONOUNCING HIMSELF THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA, HE COINED HIMSELF THE ONLY CANDIDATE THAT CAN BEAT CHAVEZ. ASSERTING THAT "RESPECT FOR THE CITIZEN" WOULD BE CENTRAL TO ALL POLICY DECISIONS, SALAS DECLARED, "I WANT TO SEE MY COUNTRY HAPPY." THIS OPTIMISTIC MESSAGE, WHICH RESONATES TRADITIONAL VENEZUELAN OPTIMISM, RECEIVED, AS IT ALWAYS DOES, RESOUNDING APPLAUSE. AT A NOVEMBER 23 "EL UNIVERSAL"-SPONSORED FORUM, SALAS EMPHASIZED THAT HE HAD A REASONABLE PLAN FOR "RADICAL CHANGE" THAT WILL RESPECT DEMOCRACY AND ENSURE PEACE. FURTHERMORE, SALAS STRESSED THAT ONLY HE HAD THE EXPERIENCE TO EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT HIS "RADICAL CHANGE" PLAN, AND URGED VOTERS TO EXAMINE HIS ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE STATE OF CARABOBO. RATHER THAN DIRECTLY ATTACK CHAVEZ AND HIS PROPOSED CONSTITUYENTE, SALAS SUGGESTED THAT "THE OTHER OPTION" WAS UNCERTAIN AND UNCLEAR. MOREOVER, SALAS IS AIRING HARD-HITTING ADS WHICH ASSERT THAT HE IS THE ONLY REASONABLE CHOICE FOR "RADICAL CHANGE IN PEACE", FOR THE OTHER CHOICE REPRESENTS VIOLENT CHANGE. THE AD CLOSSES WITH PICTURES OF THOSE WHO DIED IN CHAVEZ' FEBRUARY 1992 COUP ATTEMPT.

CHAVEZ THE "BOLIVARIANO"

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4. IN A TELEVISED NEWS INTERVIEW, HUGO CHAVEZ, THE CURRENT LEADER IN THE PRESIDENTIAL POLLS, PROCLAIMED HIMSELF A "BOLIVARIANO" AND EXPLAINED THAT HE WANTED TO CREATE A NEW POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC MODEL "THAT MIXES A BIT OF EVERYTHING". HE DENIED THAT HE WOULD FOLLOW A MARXIST PATH, AND STRESSED THAT HE WANTS VENEZUELAN TO PROSPER DURING HIS PRESIDENCY. HE HAMMERED HIS ANTI-CORRUPTION PLATFORM AS CRUCIAL TO FREEING VENEZUELAN FROM THE CURRENT PROBLEMS IN SOCIETY. CHAVEZ CONTINUES TO SAY THAT HE WANTS A REVOLUTION, AND WILL NOT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST PEOPLE WHO BELONGED TO POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE PAST. HE ALSO PROFESSES TO WANT OPTIMAL RELATIONS WITH THE U.S., AND HE DEFLECTS THE VISA QUESTION. IN A SEPARATE INTERVIEW, CHAVEZ STATED THAT HE WOULD RESPECT THE RESULTS OF THE DECEMBER 6 ELECTIONS, BUT THAT IN THIS ELECTION HE EXPECTED THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL TO WORK EFFECTIVELY AND FOR THE RESULTS TO BE KNOWN BY EARLY ELECTION NIGHT.

5. CHAVEZ, ON NOVEMBER 23 IN THE CITY OF BARCELONA, AGAIN SUGGESTED THAT THE CONSTITUYENTE MAY PUSH THE LIMITS OF THE CURRENT VENEZUELAN CONSTITUTION. CHAVEZ SAID THAT HIS CONSTITUYENTE "MAY DISSOLVE CONGRESS, REORDER THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM, AND MODIFY THE STRUCTURE AND CONSTITUTIONAL TERMS OF THE PRESIDENCY." MOREOVER, CHAVEZ STATED THAT HE WOULD IMPRISON ANY MEMBERS OF TRADITIONAL

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	DS-00	UTED-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	L-01	ADS-00
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	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	TRSE-00	T-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00
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PARTIES THAT OPPOSE THE CONSTITUYENTE. ACCORDING TO NEWSPAPER
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REPORTS, CHAVEZ HAS STATED HE WILL REMOVE ALL AD AND POSSIBLY COPEI
GOVERNORS IF HE IS ELECTED, AND NAME OTHERS TO TAKE THEIR PLACE.

SAEZ: STAYING IN THE RACE

6. UNLIKE CHAVEZ AND SALAS WHO ARE FIGHTING FOR SUPREMACY IRENE
SAEZ IS STRUGGLING TO STAY IN THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE. ACCORDING TO
THE DATOS POLL, SAEZ CURRENTLY POLLS 2.5 PERCENT. AFTER RETURNING
FROM A BRIEF VISIT TO COLOMBIA WHERE SHE MET WITH PRESIDENT
PASTRANA, SAEZ THWARTED EFFORTS BY COPEI TO CAST HER ASIDE TO OPEN
THE WAY FOR AN AD/COPEI ALLIANCE WITH COPEI EMBRACING ALFARO. SAEZ
ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY THAT SHE WILL NEITHER WITHDRAW, NOR BE FORCED
OUT. FURTHERMORE, SAEZ ADMITTED THAT ACCEPTING SUPPORT FROM COPEI,
AN ESTABLISHED TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTY, WAS A MISTAKE IN HER
BID FOR ELECTION.

ALFARO: QUASHING REBELLION IN THE RANKS

7. LUIS ALFARO, THE DISTANT THIRD PLACE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE,
RETURN HASTILY TO CARACAS ON NOVEMBER 24 TO QUASH A REBELLION
WITHIN AD RANKS. AD'S NEWLY RE-ELECTED GOVERNORS OF MONAGAS AND
COJEDES STATES APPROACHED SALAS, ON NOVEMBER 24, ABOUT SUPPORTING
HIM FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE. ALFARO RACED BACK TO CARACAS FROM
CAMPAIGNING IN AMAZONAS STATE TO ADDRESS THIS DISSENSION IN THE
RANKS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, AD MEMBERS, INCLUDING ALL
EIGHT AD GOVERNORS, SPENT OVER THREE HOURS LATE ON NOVEMBER 24
THEIR HEADQUARTERS, CALLED THE "BUNKER", TRYING TO DECIDE HOW BEST
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TO COMBAT CHAVEZ. ALFARO EMERGED VICTORIOUS AND, PARAPHRASING AD

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FOUNDER ROMULO BETANCOURT, STATED, "I WILL NOT QUIT, NOR BE FORCED OUT." ALFARO ALSO SAID TO THE PRESS THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN "THE BEST RELATIONS POSSIBLE" WITH COPEI BECAUSE COPEI WILL CONTINUE TO BE AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL FORCE IN VENEZUELA. SEVERAL PARTY LEADERS DENIED THAT "A SCHISM" WAS FORMING WITHIN AD PARTY RANKS. HOWEVER, PRESS REPORTS NOTE THAT THESE SAME LEADERS WERE UNABLE TO EXPLAIN WHY A "ROUTINE" MEETING WAS HELD ON SHORT NOTICE AND AT SUCH A LATE HOUR.

COMMENT

8. IN THE WAKE OF CHAVEZ'S NOVEMBER 8 SUCCESSES, TRADITIONAL PARTIES AD AND COPEI HAVE ATTEMPTED TO COMBAT CHAVEZ'S CONTINUED LEAD IN THE POLLS BEHAVING IN TRADITIONAL FASHION -- BY FORMING AN ALLIANCE. EFFORTS TO FORM A "DEMOCRATIC POLE" TO COUNTER CHAVEZ'S "PATRIOTIC POLE" HAVE FALLEN FLAT. MEANWHILE, AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL, POLLING DATA INDICATE THAT AD AND COPEI VOTERS HAVE BROKEN WITH TRADITIONS OF PARTY LOYALTY AND DISCIPLINE AND SHIFTED THEIR SUPPORT TO SALAS. ALFARO'S CONTINUED INABILITY TO ACHIEVE ANY UPWARD TRACTION IN THE POLLS, THE MIGRATION OF THE AD FAITHFUL AWAY FROM THE PARTY, AND CHAVEZ'S THREATS TO REMOVE NEWLY ELECTED GOVERNORS PUSHED AD'S GOVERNORS TO ACT. WHAT IS MOST NOTABLE ABOUT THIS APPARENT GOVERNOR'S REVOLT IS THAT THE GRASSROOTS DISCONTENT HAS REACHED THE UPPER LEVELS OF AD'S HIERARCHY. INASMUCH AS ALL POLITICS IN VENEZUELA ARE NOW LOCAL, THIS LATEST EFFORT TO SHIFT THE BALANCE IS SOMETHING THAT MAY BE A VERY IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT. BUT AT THIS TIME, CHAVEZ MAINTAINS HIS LEAD.

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